

As we were singing these songs this morning, the theme that was weaving through them was how we believe as Christians between the time of what's already happened in Jesus Christ coming as God incarnate and the day that He comes back and restores everything. Jesus put on flesh, became man and He was fully man and fully God. And in His coming He inaugurated the kingdom of God, He inaugurated setting things back to the way that they were meant to be. And He the kingdom on earth as it was in heaven. And then He was crucified and died for our sins, He was buried, three days later He rose from the grave, then He spent some time with His disciples and ascended with the Father, left us the Holy Spirit and He's coming back. So we live in between when He came and when He's coming. And we're looking ahead to the day that He comes back and restores everything.

And so what I want to talk about this morning is as we live between the already and the not yet, what are we supposed to be doing as God's people? What does He want from us? Why are we here? In Acts 17, Paul says of God, "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place." So God made all men. He's the Creator and Sustainer of all mankind. Every tribe, every tongue, every nation, God created it, it was God's wisdom. "...having determined allotted periods..." So not only does He create and sustain mankind, but He decides that you and I would be alive for this span of time that we're alive together. God has decided that you and I should be alive in 2009. He has determined that we would be a part of whatever generation we're a part of. He determines our allotted periods and where we would be geographically during this time, "...the boundaries of their dwelling place." And I know a lot of you are going, "I moved here because of my company, I moved here because of this..." but it was God who determined that you and I would be around during this time and in this place together. And if you just look around, it's really unbelievable to think about how God has worked in His sovereignty, providence and wisdom to arrange events to get us all in this room, in this time together. It's an absolutely profound thought. It's unbelievable. He's literally brought us together from the ends of the earth. He's brought us from India, He's brought us from Nigeria, He's brought us from Scotland, He's brought us from Portland, Oregon. He's brought us from all over the world, near and far to be His people together.

So why has He done it? What are we supposed to do? Surely He's brought us here for more than just to marvel at His bringing us here. Now we do need to marvel at that and just worship Him. We ought to just think about that and it should just make us worship that He's done that. But what does He want from our family now that He's brought us together? I really know of no better way to answer that question than the way Jesus Christ did. Jesus is arguing with the Pharisees and Sadducees, and one of the Pharisees, a lawyer, comes up to Jesus and asks Him a question in an attempt to trick Him. Even though it's a trick, I think the question and answer has profound ramifications for us answering the question: "Why are we here in this time and place?" He asks Jesus, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Essentially he's saying, "What does God really want from us?" And the way that I've always imagined the story going down is that Jesus doesn't even skip a beat. Jesus answered him and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." That's what the Lord wants from you. That's why He's brought us here, that we would love Him with all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our mind. With every bit of strength and vitality He's given us, He wants us to chase Him. And even in Acts 17, Paul says He's determined our allotted periods and boundaries of our habitation, "that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him." He's brought us together as a family from the ends of the earth to be His people, to worship. He wants us to love Him with everything that we are. And this is what we talk about every single week. We talk about repenting, letting go of

the things we hold on to that don't matter and chasing Him, placing our affections on Him, making Him ultimate. That's what we talk about every week here, repenting, loving our God, walking with Him and worshiping Him together. So Jesus says, "What God really wants is for you to love Him." He's actually quoting the central Hebrew prayer, the shema, that's found in Deuteronomy.

But He doesn't just stop there. He continues and gives him a second commandment and says, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's what God really wants from you. So since every week we talk about loving the Lord and you can't really separate the two, I want to spend the majority of our time this morning talking about what it looks like for us as a family to love our neighbor. As we love God, as we receive love from Him, as we think about the gospel, what does that look like for our family corporately? Because do you know who our neighbor is? The people that make up the city of Denton. What does it look like to love our neighbor when it's a city? Jeremiah 29 has a great example of this. Let me give you a little background. Jeremiah is writing a letter to the exiles, the men and women of Israel who have been taken into captivity to the land of Babylon. In 597 B.C, king Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians are just taking over the known world. So they sacked Jerusalem, conquered the city and taken the Israelites to Babylon as captives. But it's not that they've just done this with the Israelites; they've done this with all kinds of people. And so Babylon is this place where all these conquered peoples are streaming together. It's this pluralistic place where all these different people are together and they all have different religions, different moralities and different philosophies on life. So this is where God's people are. They've been exiled to Babylon. And so as God is speaking through Jeremiah, He's speaking to the Israelites who are in a context very similar to ours, a secular, pluralistic society where they are the minority.

And I don't know if you've been watching the shift in the landscape, but America used to be this kind of Christianized culture, but that's no more. Maybe still in the Bible Belt you can feel it a little bit, but we as God's people really are the minority. We're the minority view. We're just a people group on the side that most people in our culture think have no bearing on how life should be lived, how things should be done. And so he's writing into a context very similar to ours, and he's going to tell them how to be God's people and at the same time love the city that He has sent them to. How do you be a people of God that remain faithful to Him and at the same time love your neighbor in a setting that's secular and pluralistic? And that's what he's going to write.

And already there are two main voices that are trying to tell the Israelites what to do. You've got the false prophets who are telling the people of Israel, "God sent us into captivity to punish us for our sins, but He's not going to leave us there very long. We're only going to be here a couple of years. And so you shouldn't invest in the city at all. You should just remain this little tribe, but you don't ever go into the city unless you're going in to get what you need. But as a tribe, you should just remain separate from this big city. Because if you get too close, they'll infect you. And we're going to be out of here soon anyway, so let's just stay here. We'll just keep our little tribe safe and secure and wait until God rescues us." So you've got these false prophets saying this, and Jeremiah is going to address this as you'll see. But they're really just trying to get the Israelites into this tribalistic mindset, which I think our present church has done really well at. Isn't this always a temptation from the church, a temptation to separate ourselves from the culture, separate ourselves from the sinners, separate ourselves from the people who really need the gospel and need to be loved? And sure, we'll go be a part of culture when it does us good, we'll go see the movies when we want to, we'll go to the institutions and get a degree because it benefits us, but we really don't want to be involved with that as a church. We want to just say separate, stay clean, be safe and wait for Jesus Christ to come get us. So that's the first voice you've got speaking into the Israelite camp.

The second voice is the exact opposite, which is coming from the Babylonians themselves. They want the people of God to completely assimilate into their culture and become just like them. If you think about it from Babylon's perspective,

they've got all these different people groups, and surely that's a disaster waiting to happen. All these different people groups have been exiled, enslaved against their own will, and taken to Babylon. So how do you watch over and conquer these people? Even post-modern theorists say there's three ways which you can conquer a people. The first way is you can just subjugate them. Just make them your slaves and force them to be a part of your culture. The problem with this method is sooner or later, the slaves are just going to get angry and revolt. We've seen this all through history. We even see this in Egypt. Sooner or later, the slaves revolted and left Egypt. But over and over and over, subjugation doesn't work. The second way you can conquer people is you can just exterminate them. The problem with that is you never seem to be able to exterminate them and they just come back with more force, vigor, passion and anger. The third way the post-modern theorists say you can conquer people, and this is what the Babylonians were so good at, is that you can assimilate them into your culture with the hope that within a generation the people group you are trying to conquer would be so assimilated that they would have lost their unique identity and just become a part of your culture. So the way this goes is, "Yeah, you can have our education, you can have our jobs, you can have the highest positions of authority if you just become like us.

And so this third way is the second voice you see trying to influence the Israelites. The first voice is saying, "Just stay away." The second voice is saying, "Just become like us." And God is going to say, "It's neither." God's going to say, "I want you to go into the city, and I want you to remain and keep your unique identity as My people in the city. I want you to be in the city but not of the city." And it's really, really profound. Let's read it together. Starting in verse 4, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:" So it was God who sent the Israelites into exile. Now if you're an Israelite in captivity and you read this, you're going, "Wait a minute the Babylonians are the ones who brought us into captivity." And in this text, God is saying, "To all the exiles I have sent..." And so you may feel like you're exiled here in Denton, Texas, maybe your job brought you here, maybe your family brought you here or whatever. God's providence brought you here in the same way that it brought the Israelites to Babylon. And listen to what He tells them. "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease." So there you have it. He says, "Move into the city, but don't decrease...increase. Build homes, set up gardens and get ready to be there for a while. Invest, but don't invest so much that you lose your identity. Marry your sons and daughters there. Increase, and do not decrease. So be in the city, but remain and retain your identity as My people in the city."

So here's our example. Here's what it looks like. If our neighbor corporately is the city, here's an example of what it looks like to love our neighbor. "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile," And that word "welfare" is the Hebrew word shalom. In English, shalom means "peace" but it really doesn't translate. And let me just read you something from this scholar Cornelius Plantinga. He says, "We call it peace but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be." So God is saying, "Where things have been fractured in the city of Babylon, I want you to go seek the welfare, and I want you to make things right while you're there. I want you to serve that city to help fix what has gone wrong because of sin.

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." That's just unbelievable. "Go into the city, be involved, seek its good. But don't just become like them. You be faithful to who I've asked you to be. You be My people, you obey My law, you be counterculture in this city." What He's saying is, "You be a city of my people in that city that loves the city because you love Me. And you seek its welfare. And if you do that, you'll benefit as well.

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you,…” So here He’s talking about the false prophets who are saying, “We’re only going to be here a couple of years, so stay away from everything.” He continues, “…and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.” So in other words, “You’re going to be here a long time. You’re going to be here for seventy years, so move on in. This is where I’ve sent you, and I’ve sent you to move on in and be a good neighbor.” The next verse is a very popular verse and is often taken out of context. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” So right after He tells them they’re going to be there for seventy years, He encourages them and assures them that He has a plan for them.

And so if you read all through Scripture, this is what it looks like of how to love your neighbor when your neighbor is your city. You are to move into the city, to be for the city, to be a group of God’s people that live in the city and seek its welfare. Because we love God, we seek the welfare of our city. Over and over and over again in Scripture, you hear this theme, even with Jesus Himself. Centuries later, He’s talking to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount and says, “You are a city on a hill. Do good works and let your light shine so that people might see you doing good works.” And in this context, good works is not just them being Christian; it’s them serving and doing justice in their neighborhoods. “Do good works so that people might see you and glorify your Father in heaven.” You’ll hear it again in John 17 where Jesus says, “But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

So this is our call, this is what I’ve been thinking about and this is why we’re here. This is the second part to which Jesus responded to the Pharisee, to love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor. We’re here to love our neighbors. So we corporately as the Village Church Denton believe God has put us here in this neighborhood, in the middle of our city to love our city, to seek its welfare, to be a city of His people, a faithful people who love Him, who serve Him, who worship Him and as we’re changed by the gospel, serve and seek the shalom in our city where things have gone wrong and do it humbly, faithfully, sacrificially.

So this is why we’re here, this is why we believe God has put us here, this is what I’m passionate about. But what does it look like? How do we really love our city? How do we really serve our city? How do we seek the welfare of the neighbors who make up our city? I’ve got two things. The first one is we pray for our city. I honestly think I need to repent and maybe some of you do too for failing to believe that prayer accomplishes more than the works of our hands ever could. I think we know that as theological jargon, like we know it’s true because we’ve heard it somewhere. But to really believe that, it’s so difficult for me to hear that we’re here for the welfare of our city and not just want to run out and do it all on my own strength, but to stop and believe that if I pray, that will empower everything I hope to see happen for the glory of God and for the good of our city and my joy. I wrote it this way, “Being a city of God’s people within the city of Denton will not happen due to the right programming, the right techniques, the right events or the right staff. But rather it will happen through a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Our love for our neighbors is empowered by a deep reliance on God to change their hearts and lives.”

In Harvey Conn’s *Evangelism Preaching Grace and Doing Justice*, he says this, “We have been waiting for the time when God comes to vindicate His people and do justice. That day has come in Jesus Christ incarnated. But the day of final full justice still waits for the Lord to return. Until the job is finished by Almighty God, we pray.” Until justice rolls down

like water, until the earth is covered with the knowledge of God, we keep praying. Until every nation calls Him Lord, we keep praying, bringing men and women to Christ and to faith and gaining victory over unjust principalities and powers. Do not simply come or even primarily come or start with swamping our Senators with letters and petitions, looking for new bandwagons to jump on, holding one more successful church seminar or joining marches to the Pentagon. None of those things are bad. In fact, a lot of them are good. Change however begins with petitionary prayer, the elect crying to God day and night for our city. We pray, we seek the welfare of our city just as in Jeremiah when God said, "Seek it and pray for the city." So that's why we have monthly prayer meetings, to pray for our city. Hopefully that's what you're doing in your home groups as you're praying for everybody else. Hopefully you're also taking a moment to pray for our city. That's what we do in our staff meeting as we take your prayer requests. We take a moment and pray for our city. We pray for the things that we want to see happen, that we know are just and right but haven't been brought to completion yet. So as you walk through your day as individuals and see something that's unjust, something that needs fixing in our city, you pray. You pray, you pray, you pray. You bump into someone who doesn't know the Lord and you pray. You meet someone and hear about their dire circumstances and you pray. We pray and pray and pray for our city, and we believe as we pray, though God may not answer quickly, He does answer. That's why I think prayer is so hard, because so many times it's hard to see a tangible result, is it not? And so it's easier to just go do it yourself. Because then you can go, "Look what I did." But if it's based on you, I have to wonder how long it will really last. And so we pray and we pray and we pray for our city. We love our city, and we love it through prayer. We pray to God to move our city from where it is to where we want it to be. For our neighbors, our schools, everything in our city, we pray for justice. We pray for God's kingdom on earth in our city as it is in heaven. So that's thing we do. We pray. And I know that's everybody's favorite thing to do, to labor in prayer. But it's what the Lord says.

The second thing is we love our neighbors and our city in word and deed. Loving in word means we preach the gospel of grace to our city and to our neighbors. If we really love our neighbors, eventually we are going to have to open up our mouths and talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ in an unambiguous way. Because we can say we love Him all we want and we can do ambiguous works all we want, but what separates us from the Peace Corps is Jesus. The Foundation for a Better Life has all these billboards of Bishop Desmond Tutu or a softball player who hit a home run and blew out her ACL rounding first so her team carried her around the bases with the message of "Pass it on." There's all these inspiring messages. And I look at them and go, "That's really great. Is that what we are supposed to do as a church? Are we just part of that Foundation for a Better Life?" No. We're for transformed lives. And transformed lives at their very core only happen when the gospel of Jesus Christ is shared and people believe.

But it doesn't mean that we don't do deeds. For far too long, we've shared with our mouth, we preach at people, but we don't ever help them, we don't ever serve them, we don't ever show them what the gospel is. But I think we've almost gone the other way with this generation. We'll do all the deeds of service you want us to, but when it comes to having to open our mouth and actually explain the gospel to someone, we come up with a thousand excuses why we don't do that. We don't know how to do it, we're afraid to do it, we're too busy. I think at the end of the day, we're afraid to do it and we fear what people think of us. But there's going to be a point in time where we're just not going to be cool as Christians. I hate to burst the bubble on that one, but at the end of the day, you're just going to have to be awkward and uncool and share the gospel if you love someone. I'm not telling you how to do that, but I'm just saying it has to include Jesus Christ dying for our sins, being buried and raising from the dead three days later. And that's foolish to the world, is it not? Paul promised that it would be.

But here's what Ray Bache says about this, "Christians cannot work in the city without offering the good news of Christ. If they do social work and all kinds of things and have failed to offer the good news, they have failed to offer their best gift." How can we say we truly care about people if we do not care enough to confront them unambiguously with who Jesus Christ is and what He can do for them. In Romans 10, Paul writes, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;

for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” And almost every single week, after celebrating the Lord’s supper, John gets up and says, “You’re dismissed for the week. Go as missionaries.” We send you as missionaries, and part of that sending is a commissioning for you to share the gospel with your mouth.

And so you’re probably going, “This is not fun. I’m busy. I don’t want to be the weird guy.” So as your pastor, let me give you some practical ideas on what this could look like. Because we all struggle with this. We’re all afraid when we sit on the airplane. There’s this guilt thing where we know that we should, but we’re afraid and we don’t want to be that person and it’s just weird. Instead of feeling like you have to walk out of this room and share the gospel confrontation style with the next person you see at lunch, let’s as a campus just start by thinking about our world of relationships. This personal world of relationships includes your family, those in your family who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, some of whom may have never heard the true gospel. They’ve seen church and seen it done really poorly and they think they’ve rejected Christianity. But they haven’t rejected Christianity. All they’ve rejected is a religion, and they’ve never heard the gospel. And you get to tell them about it. You get to go, “No, this is what the gospel is.”

The second group is those geographically close to us. What about our neighbors, those who we see just by virtue of being near them? Your child’s teacher, your mechanic, the people you’re around all the time in geography, start with them. People at your vocation, people you work with, people you see during your recreation time, starting with just your relationships might you ask yourself the question, “Who do I know that needs the Lord Jesus Christ?” And pray that the Lord would give you the boldness to share. And what’s amazing is the boldness comes from the prayer. Even if you think of Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit fell and there was just an amazing evangelism thing happening and they were preaching the word of God boldly, what were they doing before that? They were together in prayer, and the Holy came upon them and emboldened them to share the good news of Jesus Christ. And it wasn’t because of guilt, and it wasn’t because they were supposed to. It was because they loved Jesus and they loved the people with whom they were sharing the gospel.

So we love our neighbors by praying for them, we love our neighbors by sharing the gospel with them in word and then by sharing the gospel with them in deed. Let me just read this to start this one off. In his book *Beyond Culture Wars*, Michael Horton wrote this, “If we have not paid our dues by years of making positive contributions to culture, we simply do not have the cultural clout to pontificate about cultural crises.” In other words, if all we’re going is talking, we aren’t going to have any clout. You shouldn’t have clout because you’ve done nothing but just talk. “If the Christian faith becomes just another organized interest group--determined to take over political parties and drive through its own narrowly defined legislative agenda--neither its political power nor its spiritual influence will grow. If, however, (Christians) are committed to a holistic social and moral vision for America--one that offers real solutions to the lack of honesty and integrity in politics, seeks to serve the common good of all humankind by offering sound ideas across a spectrum of concerns, and promotes practical ideas for strengthening homes, rebuilding schools, and restoring neighborhoods--then it could offer the leadership a society needs and wants.”

We don’t just need to talk. In fact, I would say in most cases we need to lead with our lives in doing. Now eventually we’ve got to share the gospel with our mouth, but we need to do. And this is why we do Transform. We’re loving our city together by serving it. We just go over to the school. We don’t have to do that, no one’s asking us to do that. We do that because we’re Christians and we love our city and we’re seeking its welfare. This is why we mentor students in our neighborhood. And in case you didn’t know, we mentor “atrisk” students in our neighborhood. Our prayer is that we along with the other churches in the city would be able to provide a mentor for every “at risk” student in this city. We’ve come into this city of Denton and we’ve looked around and asked the question, “How can we serve our city and set things

right?" And one of the answers we've found is that in our city, what needs to be set right is these students who are at risk of not graduating. We've talked to the school district and other partnership organizations and we've said, "If this is what you need, if this is how we can really help our city and benefit it, we'll serve there." So we go mentor students. An hour a week we mentor students. And you know what? We get to watch them graduate. And for most of us from middle-class white suburbia, it's not that big of a deal, but for many in our city, it's a massive, beautiful, wonderful accomplishment. That's justice. And the reality that so many of them are at risk of not graduating is not just tough times. I would say that it's injustice. And so by mentoring students, we're fighting injustice pragmatically an hour a week in the schools. So we mentor schools.

We're looking for ways we can serve the business community here. We're looking for ways we can serve the medical community here. We're looking for ways that we can serve the police department, the fire department. In fact, one of the pastors here on staff serves as the volunteer fire chaplain for the Denton Fire Department. We just serve the city. This is what it looks like corporately. Another way is with the international students at UNT, right across the street. We've asked the university how we could serve them. They have all these international students that come over wanting to learn English, wanting to learn American culture. 90% of them never get into an American home. There's something wrong with that. And so we serve. Yeah, we can become conversation partners. We just sit down and practice English with the students that are here from all over the world. The last few weeks there's been people from Saudi Arabia and Japan. It's just unbelievable. We get to serve the university by serving the students. So this is what it looks like corporately.

Individually, what does it look like for you? We only do a certain amount of these corporate things because we know that you're so busy, and so we want to focus it well. That's why we do Transform. Corporately we do a few things well, but individually what it looks like for you is this. You leverage every bit of your influence, every network, every skill, every talent that God has gifted you with for the glory of God and the good of our city. Primarily this looks like leveraging our vocation and our stage of life. Let me read you this. Dorothy Sayers once wrote this, "The habit of thinking of work as something one does to make money is so ingrained in us we can't seriously imagine what a revolutionary change it would be to think otherwise. People become doctors not to relieve suffering but to bring themselves and their family up in the world. People become lawyers not because they have a passion for justice but to bring themselves and their family up in the world. But during WWII one of the great surprises that many of us had in the army was that we found ourselves for the very first time in our lives happy. Why? Because for the first time in our lives we found ourselves doing something not for the pay, because it was miserable, and not for the social standing because all the different classes were thrown together, but for the sake of working together to get something done for the benefit of everyone." You redeem your vocation for the glory of Christ and the good of our city. And it becomes not just a vocation to get a paycheck (although it is that), but it's a vocation that serves a common good of those around you. And we have people in our church doing this in every profession you can think of. From teachers and coaches who have redeemed their vocation and are not just doing it for their own good, but for the good of those around them. We have bankers who do this, social workers who do this, doctors and nurses and medical professionals who come into the church and do this. We have counselors who do this, massage therapists who use their training in massage to just serve people, to serve the church, to serve the neighborhood, to relieve suffering physically. We have stylists and barbers who have done this, who have taken families that can't afford a haircut and just cut their hair for them. We have small business owners who take their business and leverage it as much as they can to build into the city of Denton. We have financial planners who have sat down with people whose finances are just not in shalom at all, and they sit down with them and work through that. We have fire fighters and police officers who work with our social life that is just a train wreck by taking care of fires and crime. These things are not a part of God's plan. And so they work to set them right until Jesus Christ comes back and ultimately sets them right.

And then we're to leverage our stations in life. We have here a lot of college students. Over and over and over again, we've tried to encourage college students to not just be here and use the city of Denton for your own good, to get a degree, to get what you need, to get what you want and then it's "Peace out." Denton is such a commuter city. So that's the idea, we just commute in, get what we need and then we leave. But in their three or four years here, college students have not traditionally focused on how they can serve their city. I want to call you out on that. A lot of the times, do you know who's leading the charge in serving the city? It's the students. Because they're the ones who have the vision, they're the ones who still have the idealistic picture of how things could be. As we get older, we get tired and are just like, "Whatever." But students just have this vigor, this vitality, this passion. If you're a student, lead us. Stay here and lead us. Serve our city and lead us in serving it. But it's not just college students. We have retirees. Let me just encourage you to not waste your retirement, and I'm not going to tell you what that means necessarily. Whatever station of life you find yourself in and whatever your vocation, if you leverage those things for the good of our city and the glory of Christ, you will get joy out of it.

So this is what God wants as we wait for Jesus Christ to come back to rescue us and set things right. This is what we do, we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and mind and we love our neighbors. And you may sitting there going, "You know what, that sounds great but I've never seen a church do that. I've never seen a church that's in the city and for the city but remains separate. I've always seen it go bad one way or the other." Let me just tell you that this is exactly what the early church did. Rodney Stark, who is a historian and sociologist, wrote a book called *The Rise of Christianity*. What he was trying to figure out in the book is why Christianity, among all the other religions, took over the Greco-Roman world and other religions didn't. What he began to learn as he read eye-witness reports and he looked at the history is that the church was doing the very thing we are talking about doing. They were being the very thing we are talking about being as God's people. And he said this from an eye-witness account as diseases were sweeping through the city, "The doctors were quite incapable of treating the disease that swept through. People became afraid to visit anyone, and as a result thousands of people died with no one to look after them. Indeed, there were many houses which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any attention. The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets. The catastrophe was so overwhelming that people became indifferent to every rule of morality. Many pushed sufferers away, even their own dearest, often throwing them into the roads before they were dead hoping to advert contagion." But this is what you do, right? If you're in tribalism, when sickness comes, you pack your tribe up and you leave. If you're assimilated and you're just in the city for what it can give you, when disease comes, you leave and go find another city to use. But if you're a group of God's people in the city for the city, as Stark wrote, "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease. For they were infected by their neighbors, and they cheerfully accepted their pains. They lost their lives in this matter, and many elders and ministers did as well. The consequences of all this is that pagans survivors faced greatly increased odds at conversion after they recovered because of their greatly increased attachment to Christians." They looked around and saw the Christians and it blew their mind and said, "Why are you here? You're not here because it's benefiting your tribe. You're not here because it's benefiting you personally. Why are you here?" And they shared the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it took the Greco-Roman world by force. And the cities that God's people were in were captivated. As the cities were changed, the whole world and the whole society was changed. That's what we're here for.

So as we come to the Lord's Supper this morning, lest we forget the motivation behind all this. The motivation behind all this is because Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God stepped down from glory and became flesh. The Word became flesh. As Eugene Peterson says, "Jesus Christ put on skin and stepped into our neighborhood to save us." And He offered Himself in word and deed to all who will accept Him in faith as their Savior and Lord and will worship and love Him with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength. And that's what we celebrate in the Lord's Supper, that the Word

became flesh and that flesh was broken and His blood was spilled for the remission of our sins. So as we come to the table, we do so joyfully. And hopefully we leave the table compelled to go out as missionaries seeking the welfare of our city in prayer, in word and in deed.

Let's pray, "Father, we want to be Your people here in our city. We want to be men and women who love You with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength. And we want to be men and women who, out of loving You and being loved by You, love our neighbors and think of them more highly than we do ourselves. So we've got a lot of work to go. Individually and corporately, we're just not there, Father. But we're saying to You this morning this is who we want to be. We want You to use us at this place, in this time for Your glory. And fill us with joy as we do it. And so as we come to the Lord's Supper this morning, we are grateful that Jesus Christ did not come to be served but came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. We are grateful that He moved into our neighborhood and lost His life for us. He was obedient to death, even death on a cross. So we remember Him this morning, even as we look forward to Him returning. It's in His name we pray. Amen."

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